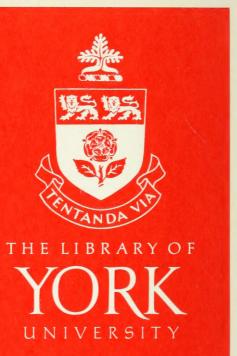
THIRTY PIECES SILVER

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CLARENCE BADINGTON KELLAND



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THIRTY TIMES DID A PIECE OF SILVER DROP INTO THE OUT-STRETCHED CLAW



BY CLARENCE B. KELLAND

ILLUSTRATED



HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS
NEW YORK AND LONDON
MCMXIII

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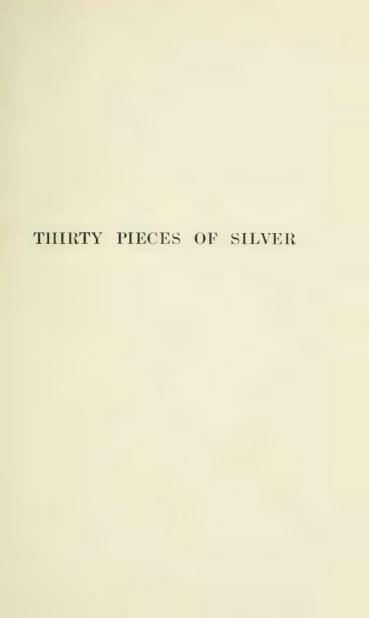
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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
PUBLISHED SEPTEMBER, 1913

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ILLUSTRATIONS

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THRONG ARMED WITH SWORDS AND STAVES " 20	









RDINARY men and women made up Carnavon's audience—shopkeepers, artisans, doctors, lawyers, clerks; and he held them breathless, spell-bound. They leaned forward in their seats, every one of the two thousand of them avaricious of each vibrant word. In obedience to his genius they swayed with laughter, rewarded his pathos with tears, gasped at the daring

of his climaxes. And yet he attacked

what many of them held most dear—their God.

From the instant of Carnavon's appearance on the platform the audience had been his, conquered before he uttered a word by the potency of his presence, by the excellence of his physical self, by the magnificence of the animal. At his first utterance there seemed to arise a collective sigh, and thenceforward until he ceased speaking his hearers were not their own, but Carnavon's.

The showman moves his puppets with invisible threads, so that they dance and posture and contort themselves as he wills; Carnavon's invisible threads reached not from his fingers to the limbs of his audience, but from his mind to their brains and hearts—and they comported them-

selves according to his desires. He was such an orator as the world hears once in many generations. He held sacred matters dangling before men and women in whom religion had been planted and watered from the cradle, yet under his relentless logic, his flashing wit, his acid irony, they shriveled and crackled to ashes and were sacred no more. Out of curiosity, men firm in their faith came to see and hear him; they departed doubting God, if not denying Him; groping for a foothold in a world he had deprived of its firm foundation.

This thing Carnavon did for a price—for one thousand dollars a lecture.

After his address Carnavon was driven to his hotel, and went at once to his apartments. Scarcely had he made himself comfortable, with a book to compose himself before retiring, when a knock sounded on his door. He closed his volume impatiently.

"Come in," he said.

The door opened reluctantly, and Carnavon was startled to see on his threshold an old man—embarrassed, hesitating—an old man white of hair, with patriarchal beard, clothed in the garb of the Salvation Army.

"Mr. Carnavon," he said, diffidently, "may I come in?"

Carnavon recovered himself and motioned to a chair. "How can I serve you?" he asked, rising with always ready courtesy.

The old man paused a moment before replying, and fumbled the vizor of his cap.

"You can give a few of the many



AN OLD MAN—EMBARRASSED, HESITATING—IN THE GARB OF THE SALVATION ARMY



minutes yet before you to an old man whose course is nearly run," he said at length, and his voice was singularly gentle, "a few minutes leavened with patience."

Carnavon bowed assent, and again motioned to a chair, which the old man declined, but smiled in the declining.

"I heard you speak to-night," he said; then paused. "You were like the picture I have loved to make of young Saul of Tarsus before his feet trod the road to Damascus."

Carnavon was astonished. Not infrequently had he been compelled to listen privately to his opponents, to ministers of the gospel, to zealots who forced themselves upon him to convert or condemn. To all alike, whether they came in humility and

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love, or in heat and with invective on their lips, he had comported himself with the same dignity, the same courtesy, the same self-restraint. But none had been like this little old man in uniform; about none had hovered this spirit of gentle sweetness, of fatherly affection.

"Sir," continued the aged warrior of God's Army of the Streets, "I have not come hoping to convert you to my belief. You are a greater man than I, blessed with greater gifts, and I could not prevail. I have come to ask you one question. Sir, are you sincere? Do you believe in your heart the things you say with your lips?"

"If I did not," replied Carnavon, "I should remain silent."

The old man regarded him steadily,

his expression one almost of affection. "Sir," he said, presently, "can perfect sincerity and one thousand dollars a lecture go hand in hand? When I am gone I ask you to consider this. One, believing in the Master, betrayed Him for thirty pieces of silver; you, not believing in Him, cannot betray Him, but you war on Him with the weapons He gave you—for many times thirty pieces of silver. With your honest unbelief I have no quarrel; when you pass it on to others for gain you do an ill thing. God may forgive the honest doubt—the thirty pieces of silver He cannot forget."

The stranger spoke as to one he loved, without rancor, softening criticism with gentleness. Carnavon was not offended; indeed, he was moved, but waited, making no reply.

Again the old man spoke, this time as he retired toward the door.

"Sir, I have liked to think of Saul as I see you. So have I pictured him when he went out in his young strength against the followers of the Master. He traveled his road to Damascus and saw his vision. One day a vision may come to you." He paused in the open door and stretched out his hand with the gesture of one who asks a thrice-valued favor. "If the vision comes, and I am yet alive, will you seek me out? I have not far to go before my race is done, but that would be sweet knowledge for me to carry yonder with me."

Carnavon rose, smiling the smile that drew men to him. "If Saul sees his vision and becomes Paul, he will come to you," he said.

Then the door closed on the ancient soldier of peace, and he was gone.

Carnavon having no heaven to look forward to, strove to make his plot of earth more beautiful. His home, a structure to delight the fancy, stood among acres whose loveliness was wrought by art that aided and followed, rather than sought to lead nature. Within the house, wherever the eye rested, were paintings, statues, tapestries, furnishings that made one eager for a longer scrutiny. Vases of exquisite form, antiques from the hands of long-dead masters, medallions wrought by the great Cellini himself, made splendid nook and niche. Indeed, Carnavon loved his medals with a particular affection; they were his avocation, they and their

baser kindred born to commerce—coins.

No common coin-collector was he; not for age or rarity or country did he seek, but for beauty alone. A coin no bigger than the nail of one's finger, if it but presented the face of beauty, gave him greater joy than a canvas made immortal by Titian or a statue hewn by the chisel of the demigod Michael Angelo. In every human creature is a store of love: love in desuetude is unthinkable—it must have an object, worthy or unworthy, virtuous or deprayed. No woman had nestled into Carnavon's life; religion he rejected; his medals and coins remained, and he loved them for their loveliness.

He sat in his library when a servant entered, saying: "There is a man at

the door who asks to see you. He had no card."

"Ask him his business with me," directed Carnavon.

The man returned presently. "It is about a coin, sir—a rare coin, he says."

"Show him in," said Carnavon.

He arose as the caller entered. The man was of doubtful age; evidently a Hebrew. "Mr. Carnavon?" he asked. Carnavon nodded.

"I have brought for your inspection a rare and, I consider, beautiful coin. I understand you are interested in such."

"Yes," replied Carnavon, "provided they *are* beautiful."

The Hebrew drew a tiny parcel from his pocket, removed a paper wrapping, and disclosed a small metal box. Raising the cover of this, he extracted a small silver coin and extended it to Carnavon.

The master of the house accepted it and moved closer to the light, scrutinizing it jealously. A puzzled expression crossed his face. "I have never seen a similar piece," he said. "Indeed, I must confess I do not identify it. Will you do so for me?"

"It is of Hebrew coinage," explained the dealer. "You will observe in relief the olive branch and the pot of manna. Simon the High Priest had authority to stamp and issue it. Nineteen hundred odd years, you see, is its age, yet it is wonderfully preserved—scarcely worn. I have handled thousands of coins, but none of such antiquity not worn almost to obliteration."

"It is rarely beautiful," admitted Carnavon. "I should like to possess it. What price have you set?"

"Though I am a dealer, I am at a loss to give it a value. Allow me to leave it with you a few days, not as a coin, but as an article of *vertu*. At the end of that time make me an offer."

It was a strange enough proposition, yet fair, and Carnavon acceded instantly. The Hebrew expressed his thanks and took his departure.

Carnavon moved to the inviting depths of a huge chair before the glowing log in the fireplace, and, holding the coin of Simon the High Priest in his palm, leaned forward, the better to possess the beauties of it. Over and over he turned it, marking its perfection of design, the miracle of

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its preservation. A coin of Simon the High Priest! To a master-student of sacred history what scenes were limned at the mention of that name! It was Carnavon's profession to jeer at inconsistencies in the epic of the Passion; to tear it part from part with the scalpel of his remorseless logic; but to deny its poetic beauty must be left to another than he. It was his custom to refer to it as the greatest fiction in the world.

An hour he spent thus, delighting in his new possession. At last, raising his eyes at the sudden darkening of the room, he saw that the room was no longer about him; he was standing in a great court, stone-paved, high-walled, porticoed, and before him rose majestically the pile of a great building, its successive terraces lifting up-

ward and upward in awful grandeur. Carnavon gazed incredulous, for the outline of the structure was familiar to him. He knew that he was standing in the shadow of Solomon's porch, in the court of the Gentiles of Herod's temple in Jerusalem.

As he marveled, a man, furtive of action, appeared from the direction of the gate of Coponius, and strode rapidly inside the confines marked by the soreg, beyond which no Gentile dare pass on pain of death. Carnavon knew the law, yet he was drawn to follow, impelled by something outside his own will. Doubtless he would have gone of his own volition, for the man passed so close to him that Carnavon saw his face, the gleaming whites of his eyes; saw terror made more repulsive by cupidity. The

cheeks were unnaturally white, their pallor accentuated by the blackness of the hair and beard. One hand was hidden within the folds of the garment, the other was potently expressive; now it closed tightly, trembling with the tension of gripping muscles, now it opened slowly, finger by finger. It was the hand of a man in agony, of a man who suffered torture in soul or body. It was the face that told Carnavon the pain was not physical.

Seeing such a one in such a place alone, Carnavon must have followed.

Within, pacing restlessly up and down in the shadow, was an imposing patriarchal figure, priestly robed, wearing the insignia of the High Priest of Israel. The moonlight fell on his face, and Carnavon read impa-

tience, anxiety, perturbation. Now and again he lifted his shoulders, expelled his breath. Toward him the furtive stranger hastened. Carnavon stood in the shelter of a pillar and watched and listened.

The High Priest stopped, bent his body forward, and scrutinized the figure that approached him. The furtive one paused a few paces away, bent his head obsequiously. His eyes could not meet the eyes of the High Priest; perhaps the jewels set in the priest's breastplate blinded him, for they gave back the glare of the moon.

"I have come," said the man. Carnavon could see the trembling of his hand.

"It is well," said the High Priest, in guarded tones. As the man drew

nearer, the priest drew his garments away as though fearing defilement. "Wilt thou do the thing?"

The man opened his mouth to speak, but words died in his throat; he moved his lower jaw, as one does who talks, but no sound came. He raised his hand, which shook as with a palsy, and wiped his brow. At last he became articulate. "I will do it," he whispered, and shuddered in the speaking.

"The plan and the place, thou knowest them?"

"I know them."

"And the hour?"

"Thy men must watch.... The hour I know not. They must watch and follow."

"Where shall they watch?"

"In a place I will show them. . . .

Before going in I will lead them to the spot."

Silence fell. The High Priest frowned darkly, yet his face, strong, crafty, impressive, told of his satisfaction in a desire fulfilled, in an end accomplished. The furtive man stood motionless, an evil thing to look upon.

"By what sign shall my soldiers know Him whom we seek?" asked the High Priest. "Perchance they may mistake another for Him. . . . But thou goest with them to show the way and the place. When thou hast come unto Him, go thou to His side and kiss Him on the cheek as a sign that He is the man and none other." There was scorn in the voice of Simon the High Priest for the instrument that was fitted to his hand.

He turned on his heel and would

have departed, but the furtive man clutched his mantle and detained him. Simon frowned back into that face distorted by avarice, and his eyes grew hard.

"Truly," said he, "I had forgotten thy wage." And forthwith he drew a bag from the folds of his upper garment, and counted money into the hand of the man—and Carnavon counted with him. Thirty times did the fingers of the High Priest enter the bag, and thirty times did a piece of silver drop into the outstretched, trembling claw. The last of the thirty fell from the overflowing palm and rolled to Carnavon's feet, resting in a spot of moonlight. It glittered whitely —and in distinct relief was visible the familiar pot of manna: in every respect it was the fellow of the





coin Carnavon still grasped in his hand.

Carnavon looked again, and the temple was not there, neither was the furtive one, nor the High Priest. All about him stretched the darkness, light-dotted; in the distance, toward the city, the mingled voices of approaching tumult affronted the night. Presently along the road hurried and jostled a throng armed with swords and staves, at their head the furtive stranger of the temple, his black beard sunk on his breast. Carnavon was impelled to follow them.

Carnavon outstripped the rabble. The road seemed familiar to him, his destination determined. He hurried onward.

On a hillside he came on a little body of men sleeping. He paused,

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looked on them, and wondered. Presently, from a little way off came a figure, erect, bare of head, with face majestically sorrowful. Awe of that presence laid itself on Carnavon so that he was fain to avert his eyes. The Man paused by the sleeping group, sighed, shook his head tenderly, and went away again to kneel beside a rock and pray. His voice was audible to Carnavon.

"Oh, my father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. . . ."

After a time spent in supplication and anguish of spirit the Man arose, his face lightened, serene, and came again to the sleeping group. Carnavon's eyes filled, for never had he dreamed a face of such gentle bravery. The Man spoke again:

"Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold the hour is at hand. . . ."

While he was speaking the rabble ascended the hill, and at their head cringed the furtive one. The Man watched their approach calmly, but his companions, trembling, gathered about him, pressing close, trembling, calling out in fear.

The furtive one pushed his way to the center of the group, to the very side of the Man, and cried out in a voice hoarse, fearful, quivering, "Master . . . Master," and kissed Him on the cheek. And as he moved, Carnavon could hear the sound of pieces of silver jingling together in his garment.

The Master spoke softly, calmly, with infinite sorrow. "Judas"—His eyes rested an instant on the cringing

figure—"betrayest thou the Son of Man with a kiss?"

Cries of dismay rose weakly from the little group of followers, and they fell away, seeking safety for themselves—all save one, a man of face to remember, who feared, yet was steadfast in defense of Him he loved. This one drew his sword and threw himself before the Master, and as the soldiers of the High Priest pressed forward he smote at them and severed an ear from the head of one of the foremost.

The Master commanded him to put up his weapon, stepped forward a pace, touched the wound with his finger, and it was healed.

Carnavon looked again, and it was daylight in the court of Herod's temple. He passed inward and stood with an assembly about the person of the High Priest Simon, men of weight and dignity, the priests and elders of the people. As he watched them, heads together, discussing some matter of import, there came again the furtive one, now ridden by remorse, by terror, so that his face was ill to look upon, and he approached the High Priest, saying, in a voice like the croaking of a raven, "I have sinned, . . . I have betrayed the innocent blood," and fell upon his knees, his hands full of silver.

The High Priest looked on him coldly, and replied in even tones: "What is that to us? See thou to that."

Whereupon the furtive one flung the silver from him wildly, and rushed out of the temple, Carnavor following, until they came to a lonely place; and

there the man hanged himself from a tree so that his feet dangled over a precipice.

Again Carnavon stood by a roadside, and the way was filled with a great multitude, shouting, distracted; in their midst a company of soldiers surrounding the Man who staggered under the weight of a cross—staggered, fell to his knees, for the weight was too great for his strength. The soldiers consulted, then laid hands on a man of the people and made him take up the burden.

The procession moved forward slowly. Behind the man came a company, composed for the most part of women, who wept and raised their voices in sorrow, lamenting His anguish. He turned to them and said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for

me . . . " The remainder of his words were lost to Carnavon in the general clamor.

Again, Carnavon stood upon a bare, forbidding hillside among a shouting, gesticulating throng, and from the apex of the hill arose three crosses. Carnavon covered his face, for the sight was cruel.

From the mob of shouting people jeers and gibes arose; and one man, more conspicuous than his fellows, strode nearer the foot of the central cross and cried, loudly:

"For thirty pieces of silver was He sold—this King of the Jews. Doth not a slave bring more?" And he continued to utter gibes and ridicule.

At last the Man opened His eyes and regarded His tormentor, not with anger, not rebukingly, but with majestic calm. It was not a glance to strike terror; it conveyed no anger, no threat; but the tormentor fell silent, awed by its divine loftiness.

It seemed to Carnavon that the Master's eyes sought him out and touched him for an instant, and he sank to the ground, crouching in awe and hiding his face from the eyes of Him he had persecuted.

Suddenly there fell a darkness that was impenetrable. The Master uttered His final words, "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit." His head sank on His breast; His suffering was done. All about Carnavon reigned confusion, terror. Rumors were rife; men ran hither and yon, not knowing what they did; prodigies were reported from mouth to mouth, and one there

was who cried, in a terrible voice, "The curtain of the temple is rent in twain..."

Behold, it was another day. Carnavon stood outside the walls of the Holy City, and the hour was dawn. Along the road which lay before him came two women, one of whom Carnavon recognized as the mother of the Master, and their faces were alight with joy. Carnavon wondered in his heart how this could be. Suddenly there was another figure walking by their side, a Man. Carnavon started, stared in astonishment, for it was a figure that could not be mistakenthe same noble face he had seen in the garden and on the cross. He abased himself, hiding his face. It was the Master whom he had seen crucified, dead, hanging from the cross. It was

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the Master, risen from the dead, released from His tomb. . . .

Carnavon dared lift his face to look again. The eyes of the Master were fixed on him, met his eyes, and the Master smiled. . . .

Carnavon raised himself to his feet from the depths of his chair before the blazing fire, and passed his hand across his eyes as though to wipe away a film. Then, without movement, he stood staring into the blaze, his face a mask; and so he remained until the log was embers and the blaze a glow. He sighed. His features changed from stoniness to grief, and he raised the hand in which was clasped the piece of silver of the coinage of Simon, opened it, and, bowing his head, gazed reverently on a sacred thing.

Swiftly his bearing altered to determination, to action. He thrust on his coat, his hat, and went out into the night, traversing road and street until he came to the crowded places of the city where men turned night into day. And as he walked he listened. Faintly, borne to his ear on the chill wind, came the sound of singing, of instruments of music, of drums, and he smiled.

In a public square huddled a shivering, squalid crowd, its nucleus a little band of uniformed soldiers of the Cross—men and women. As Carnavon approached, the music ceased; a small, tottering old man, silvery of hair and beard, doffed his cap and stepped to the center of the circle, raising his hand for silence. Carnavon had found whom he sought; it was the stranger of the hotel room.

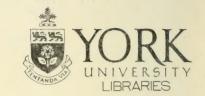
Carnavon made his way through the fringe of idle listeners, swayed to the side of the praying old man, and, urged to impatience by emotion, waited not for him to cease. He clutched an extended hand, and, broken-voiced, cried: "I have sinned.... I have betrayed the innocent blood!"

The old preacher of the streets paused, looked on Carnavon's face, and over his wrinkled features spread a look of perfect peace, of richest happiness.

"You—you have stood on the road to Damascus—" he whispered, hands groping for Carnavon's hands.

"And I have seen a vision," Carnavon said, simply.





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